

Step away from the avocado — you could end up losing a hand

Deborah Ross

Gosh, who knew avocados were the Devil's work? In all seriousness. Joking aside. (I've just put two jokes aside, and they're furious. I may have to pop out and get them flowers later.) Surgeons say that growing numbers of people are reporting to A&E with what they are calling "avocado hand". David Shewring, the vice-president of the British Society for Surgery of the Hand, told *The Times* yesterday: "Recently the health benefits of avocado have been advocated, with an increase in their popularity — and a consequent increase in related injuries."

Staff at St Thomas' Hospital in London were even quoted as saying they are well-acquainted to the "post-brunch surge" on Saturdays, while *The New York Times* ran an article headlined: "How to cut an avocado without cutting yourself" after the wife of a staff member was taken to hospital with a deep wound.

How so? As far as I can gather, you cup a halved avocado in your hand, plunge in the knife to spear out the stone, but the flesh is softer than you think, and... you can fill in the rest. You don't exactly do "a Tim Ifield", but it may be the palm version of a Tim Ifield. We need safety guidelines, plus tips on how to manage avocados generally, so, because I am of an obliging nature, here you are:

How will I know when my avocado is ripe?

Your avocado will be ripe for, on average, 12 seconds when Jupiter is in the ascendant, there is a full moon, and Take That are on tour in a town near you.

This is certainly not a given, but something may catch your eye as you impatiently thumb your way through to the cinema section, usually on or around page 48, and which my mother always cut out and kept during her lifetime, and which my father still does cut out and keep, along with my Auntie Sylvia who will sometimes take it to show her bridge friends. (That's how good it is, and I would say that even if I didn't write it.)

On this occasion, what caught my eye was George "No Jobs Left for Anyone Else" Osborne's diary, which recounts his first week as editor of the *London Evening Standard*, a job that obviously leaves him with time on his hands.

He marvels: "There is something remarkable, magical even, about the way every day tens of thousands of words are written on everything from the implications of the French election

to Arsène Wenger, to this summer's trendiest cocktails; then laid out on pages with striking pictures and adverts; printed on a million copies; and delivered to hundreds of Tube stations, supermarkets and the like around our capital every afternoon — all so you can have in your hand a daily quality compendium on what's going on in the world... amazing." So he's discovered what a newspaper is. Such a quick learner!



Boys' and girls'

Giles Smith thought the Mays were retro. Then he looked at his own house

I don't think Philip May meant to raise the tired and outmoded sexual stereotype of the inadequately domesticated male when he brought up the bins. I think he meant to raise the tired and outmoded sexual stereotype of the hen-pecked husband.

"I get to decide when I take the bins out," the prime minister's other half said, as he sat with his wife on *The One Show*, "not if I take the bins out." I am, Phil appeared to be saying, a little plaintively, my own boss in only the narrowest sense, a man of limited self-determination — caught between a rock and a wheelie bin.

Then his wife interjected: "There's boy and girl jobs, you see." And suddenly this light conversation was chin-deep in sexual politics. "I definitely do the taking the bins out," Phil confirmed, digging deeper. "I do the traditional boy job by and large." At which point, a nation winced as the years unwound and the noise was heard of a reconditioned glass ceiling being winched back into place. Brexit hadn't even happened and it was 1953 again round at the Mays'.

What a depressingly retrograde moment for people who have grown up in the era of female emancipation and arrived at a more enlightened position with regard to the sharing of the domestic burden. People like me, for instance, whose unswerving instinct when confronted with anything that looks even vaguely like it might fall into the category of a "traditional boy job" is to get a man in. This would include the entry-level DIY task of putting up pictures, which I tried once and won't be doing again. After an unfortunate mathematical miscalculation during the project's lengthy planning stages, the string and the hook ended up being visible above the picture. When it comes to jobs, there are distinctions relating to gender and then there is the matter of basic competence, which is prior to and overrides those distinctions.

Still, who among us hasn't paused for a moment's reflection since that interview? Because here's a confession: I, too, take the bins out, but my wife, like Theresa May, never takes the bins out. As for my children, are you kidding? They don't even know where the bins are. Yet I'm out there every week — lifting them around the car, indeed — in frank defiance of years of patient deconstruction for traditional patriarchal roles. I'm like Phil. On Mondays I am bin man: hear me roar.

So how much of my domestic life is organised along politically suspect gender lines? The cooking? Well, that's a "boy job". Of course it is. And I don't just mean barbecues and signature curries and self-important roasts, and all that other shouty, masculine stuff for which I blame Gordon Ramsay. I mean routine family-meal provision. This is 2017, for heaven's sake, and if you're the kind of man who thinks he has a divine right to find his supper on the table at six o'clock — well, even Phil had a pop at those old-schoolers.

However, a confession: when I say cooking in my house is a "boy job", it's also a "girl job". And, if I'm being honest, it's also a "girl job" more often than it's a "boy job". Far more often. I mean, perhaps 20 times more often. But that's only because the "girl" in question is "so much better at it" and also "so much quicker at it". Let's just characterise this as an example of what Phil sensitively summarised as "the give and take in every marriage".

Thank-you letters and birthday presents, though? Girl job every time. Why should that be? Getting wrapping paper, however, and wrapping up: boy job. Which possibly suggests that some of these habitual task allotments may be nothing to do with sex, but simply the product of a division of labour that you have arbitrarily made, somewhere down the line, and stuck with.

Perhaps that also explains why seeing off Jehovah's Witnesses is a boy job. Does that fall to you, too, Phil?

Mowing the lawn? Definitely a boy job in this household. But tending the flowerbeds? Girl job. Odd. Similarly, online grocery shopping? Girl job for us. But supermarket shopping (with trolleys, car parks, long till receipts, ergo more macho): boy job. The car? Boy job, obviously. Dishwasher maintenance? Boy. Getting rid of not-quite-dead stuff the cats bring in? Me. Anything connected with insurance or pensions: mine somehow, just as they were my father's before me. Whereas, the laundry... Hell's bells. What year are we living in?

Best to try and stay positive, though, and concentrate on how we shape the future generation. For this, surely, is how behaviour and expectations evolve. Accordingly, in our case, we have been very careful to apportion to our children, irrespective of sex, carefully non-gender-specific "boy and girl jobs", which, avoiding controversy, we simply refer to as "jobs", and which include cooking for themselves (if their mother's not about), clearing the table after supper (or at any rate leaving the dishes on top of the dishwasher, from where they will simply melt inside by a process of osmosis) and taking their piles of laundered clothes on that always difficult final stage of the journey back to their bedrooms (or, as it tends to be, leaving that pile on the stairs and using it as a kind of pop-up wardrobe).

By these means we are hopeful that we are raising children who will never grow up to be a prime minister or a prime minister's consort and go on TV and refer to "girl jobs and boy jobs", thereby forcing everybody to conclude they must have had their eyes and ears closed for the past five decades.

Meanwhile, there are bins to be put out and someone has got to do it, and, in the absence of any other volunteers, it looks like it's going to be me and Phil. Mind you, did you catch what he had to say about clothes? "I quite like ties. I like jackets, stuff like that." Ties? Jackets? Come on, Phil — at least try to get with the times.

jobs? It's 1953 again

COVER: ROMA FLOOD. BELOW: REUTERS



Ironing is as male as beard trimming
Helen Rumbelow

Sometimes I watch as my partner applies hot metal to the breasts of another woman. But not often. For him, ironing is a "men's only" event, and it is for that reason, I can only imagine, that many years ago I bought for him a novelty ironing board cover that featured a full-length woman in a bikini. When the heat of the iron is applied, hard, to her bikini top, it magically fades to reveal her breasts. Quite why I thought introducing a reasonably kinky soft-porn element to domestic tasks was the right way to lighten the load, I can't remember.

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such as "the Performer" and "Elite", with considerable read-across from condom brands.

Meanwhile the bins are all mine. A woman doing the bins is like fighting in frontline combat for the first time: hero work. Yet who wouldn't want this job? Infrequent, satisfying and with the thrilling opportunity to be on the street in the dark in your nightwear. Part of the enjoyment of the bins, though, is to conceal its enjoyment. You must return to the house — which you left 30 seconds earlier — with the grim, battle-hardened air of someone returning from the dark side. As I sling down the recycling tub, I am signalling: "The family is safe now."

Dishwashing, cooking and laundry we split fairly Swedishly: that he is a wiper and I am a sweeper was dumb luck but something that should be accounted for on dating profiles.

Washing up, though, after sitting alone with a bottle of scotch for three hours, will finally enter the lounge with some kitchen roll and a bottle of Mr Muscle spray. He will dispose of the body, then experience a month of sporadic night terrors.

The wife, believing that there are almost certainly more mice about,

Are you in a May marriage?
Take Ben Machell's quiz

How Theresa and Philip are you at home? Take the test.

- 1 Which of your wife's domestic responsibilities do you suspect she dislikes the most?
 - A) Having to retile the roof.
 - B) Feather-dusting your collection of Toby jugs.
 - C) Silently weaving huge tapestries by candlelight.

- 2 Uh oh! You're a woman and it's bin day! But your husband is away and he forgot to do the bins before he left! How do you deal with this?
 - A) You just... take the bins out?
 - B) You do the bins yourself, but inwardly curse him and resolve to not bring him his pipe and slippers tonight until he actually has to ask for them, at which point you obviously will.
 - C) You quickly race upstairs and disguise yourself as your husband using stage make-up, elaborate prosthetics and some of his clothes. Then you rush after the binmen and hand them your recycling with a gruff "Here you go, lads" before nodding at your confused neighbours.
- 3 The milk in the fridge may or may not have gone off and smelling it has so far proved inconclusive. To whom falls the solemn duty of taking a gulp and passing judgment?
 - A) Whoever's most desperate for a cup of coffee.
 - B) The man, but with a heavy heart, as if he's serving as food taster for history's least popular Roman emperor.
 - C) The man. Only first he strips to the waist, flexes all his muscles, gives a war cry, then downs all the milk in one go. And even if what comes out of the bottles is effectively cheese, he will swirl it round his mouth before shrugging and saying: "Tastes totally fine to me."
- 4 Finally, household chores, delineated by gender, are in your opinion what?
 - A) A demeaning and archaic throwback.
 - B) Just how things tend to shake out in the real world.
 - C) The very glue that binds your marriage.

If you answered mostly...

As: You are not remotely Theresa and Philip. You live in a strange, gender-neutral domestic hellscape that would confuse and frighten them. I hope you're happy.

B: Getting there. You seem to understand that "boy jobs" and "girl jobs" exist and are important. You just need to take things to the next level and perhaps invest in some pink and blue his'n' hers scouring pads.

C: You are totally Theresa and Philip! You live in a world where men are men and women don't know how bin bags work. Congratulations!

